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Fulbright Unit Got Memo, Few Saw It

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National Security Study Memorandum No. 1, which became a basis for the Nixon administration's Vietnam policy, was covertly passed on to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee some time in 1969.

The availability of the document, however, remained a secret even to committee members, apparently only a few of the committee's staff men got to see it. Other persons who learned that it was in a special double-locked safe heard about it through the Senate grapevine.

NSSM 1 was, in effect, "leaked" to the committee, it was learned, and not provided by the administration. The way it was acquired, it was suggested, was one of the reasons that senators on the committee were not officially informed about it.

Whether even Sen. J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, knew about it at the time was unclear yesterday. The Arkansas Democrat, told that the document was in committee hands since 1969, said: "Is that so? I didn't know we had it." Then he added "I'll inquire and see. This is ancient history."

Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), a leading critic of U.S. involvement in the war who has co-sponsored three end-the-war amendments, said yesterday that he had

not known the document was in committee hands. "I think there is a failure in the mechanism," he said when told about it. "The staff is not informing members of what is available."

Church added: "The committee might want to keep it undisclosed, because of the way it was acquired ... but there is no justification for not letting the members ... know about it."

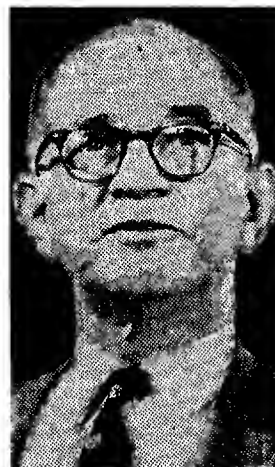
The senator said it might have been helpful to have seen the document before formulating legislation, but he was not very disturbed. "It hasn't been the lack of information concerning this war that has handicapped or manacled us. We've known enough for years to know that it's been a mistake."

Fulbright, in a separate telephone interview, also said that there has been "no dearth of information" about what was happening in Vietnam.

Members of the Foreign Relations Committee have frequently urged the administration to be more willing to provide documents on which policy is based.

But a committee source said that when they ask for documents the administration goes on the assumption that they will declassify or leak them. "We're just as tight and secure as the administration," this source said.

"I don't believe you can



SEN. J. W. FULBRIGHT
... didn't see memo

find any cases where we leak papers that are classified. We have fairly tight rules as to how classified documents are handled in the committee ... double-locked safes and all."

The handling of NSSM 1 would appear to bear out this assertion. It was understood that the committee received the document at about the time it received a copy of the Pentagon Papers. The committee sought to get the Defense Department to declassify the papers, but no one yesterday seemed to remember whether anyone tried to do the same with NSSM 1.

James G. Lowenstein, a committee staff consultant who with Richard M. Moose was sent to Vietnam to report on the progress of pacification, the prospects for Vietnamization, the domestic political situation and the outlook for negotiations, said he and his colleague head NSSM1 before leaving in December, 1969.